THE QUESTION OF SCUTARI

PARIS 1919

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THE QUESTION OF SCUTARI

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1. — Geographical arguments

All Montenegrin rivers belonglng to the Adriatic watershed flow into the Lake ot Scutari whose waters flow into the Adriatic by the medium of the river Boyana.

That is the only natural road of Montenegro to the sea. It is sufficient to cast a glance on the map to see it and to be convinced that Scutari has always been the geographical centre of the ancient Serbian province of Zeta, named to-day Montenegro. Scutari is therefore the natural outlet to the sea for the major part of Montenegro which constitutes its natural hinterland. Montenegro could be separated from Scutari only by violence.

2. — Historical and Ethnical arguments

The town of Scutari was founded by Alexander the Great in tho 4-th century B. C.

After the arrival of the Serbs in the Balkans, in the 7-th century A. D. the second independent centre of the Serbian people was the ancient Dioclea whose chief town was Scutari. Since that epoch one has always considered Scutari as one of the centres of the Serbian State. In the 11-th century, one of the sovereigns of Zeta, Michael Voislavljevitch obtained from Pope Alexander II, the Royal title which was borne later by other sovereigns of Zeta, his son Bodin, his nephew Radoslav, etc. Bodin and Radoslav and other members of the Royal family were interred in the well-known monasteries of Saint Serge and Vakhur-la-Boyane, whose ruins can still be seen.

The first of these sovereigns founded the first Serbian Roman Catholic Archbishopric in Antivari, a see which was confirmed by the Bull of Pope Alexander II in 1067. Its name was "Archiepiscopus totius

regni Serbiae" and, since the XIV century: "Primaria sedes totius regni Serbiae".

Here is a classical proof showing that Scutari was Serbian. In 1096 one of the chiefs of the first crusade, Raymond of Toulouse, writes in the description of his journey: "At last we arrived in Scutari where the Slav King lives". Orderic Vitalis, another writer of the same epoch, states that this King's name was Bodin.

In the 13-th and 14-th centuries, Scutari has played an important part in the Serbian State under the celebrated dynasty of the Nemanitch. Monasteries and churches, built on both banks of the Boyana and whose ruins still exist, are the best proof of this.

Queen Helena, of French origin and married to Urosh Nemanitch the Great (1242 to 1276), built, between Cattaro and St. John of Medua, thirteen monasteries and churches, as is proved by historical documents as well as by the inscriptions which can still be read on the ruins of St. Serge.

The heirs to the throne and the aged members of the family of Nemanitch used to dwell there because Scutari and the whole of Zeta had been given to them as appanage. Emperor Dushan, while he was heir-apparent, used to live there.

After the death of the last Nemanitch, Emperor Urosh in 1371, and after the dismemberment of the Serbian State, the Baltitchs reigned in Scutari. One of them, George Strachimirovitch, under the onslaught of the Turks and wishing to save the rest of his country, ceded Scutari to the Venetians. Some time after, his wife Yela re-took Scutari. His son Balsha III reigned there till his death in 1421. At this date the Venetians occupied it again and kept it until 1479; then they were obliged to cede it to the Turks, obtaining from the latter in exchange certain commercial concessions. Thus Scutari remained under Turkish domination till 1913.

It is clearly evident therefore that Scutari has been the organic centre around which the second Serbian State crystallized itself. The population of the town and the environs were Serbian. All its monuments prove it. The Serbian element was still so strong in the 16-th

century that a Serbian printing press was founded in Scutari. But on one side under the Venetian pressure and on the other side under the Turkish tyranny this element suffered very much. One part took refuge in the mountains of the present Montenegro, the others who were attached to their land were obliged to change their religion and some of them became Roman Catholics, others Mohammedans. The Albanian minority which lived in the mountains very soon accepted to serve the Turks ; the Serbs were the only ones who were considered by these as enemies. In order to save their lives, the Serbs were obliged to learn the Albanian tongue, the language of a nation which enjoyed the greatest confidence with the Sultans of Constantinople.

Thus it came to pass that tribes of pure Serb race like the Krasnitchi (or Krstnitchi), Groudé, Klémenti, Hoti, Kastrati, Shalié and others became Albanized after a certain time, shorter or longer. The Groudés remained Orthodox till the end of the 18-th century. Besides the aforementioned historical monuments one could prove the Serbian origin of nearly all the tribes of upper Albania by the fact that they preserved the Serbian character and customs as well as the gousle (musical instrument) ; the Serbian national songs are as popular there as in any other Serbian region (1).

One knows that the Slava is an essentially Serbian festival which is not kept by any other nation. These tribes celebrate in their songs the heroes known to be Serbs and they still celebrate the Slava even though they are Mohammedans or Roman Catholics.

This is a feast which the Serbians celebrate every year in honour of the patron saint of the family as a rememberance of their conversion to Christianity. With a greater part of these tribes, one still finds souvenirs of the time when they were Orthodox.

Another proof showing that from the ethnical point of view nearly all the environs of Scutari are Serbian is in the names of the villages, the

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(1) The Serbian people has devoted many of its national songs to Scutari and one of the most remarkable of these is the song describing the foundation of Scutari on the Boyana.

rivers, the mountains (Kamenitza, Stara, Boritch, Golemi, Brditza, Obod Velye Polye, etc.), which are purely Serbian.

One does not possess any statistics concerning the number of the inhabitants around Scutari, living on the right bank of the Drin, but we can indicate the area of the contested territory: about 3600 square kilometres. Besides the Orthodox Serbians residing in Scutari, there are some others in different neighbouring villages Vraka, Vramenica, Derigniat, etc., as well as several thousands of Mohammedan Serbians Serbs from Bosnia-Herzegovina.

3. — Political arguments

Scutari was reconquered from the Turks by the Montenegrins, with the aid of Serbian troops in 1913, at the cost of enormous sacrifices, proved by the thousands of their graves which are in and around Scutari.

One remembers that on this occasion Austria-Hungary consented to leave Scutari to Montenegro, but only under the condition that the Lovchen should become Austrian or was at least neutralized. Montenegro rejected this offer and when the Austrian pretensions threatened to provoke a European war, the Montenegrin Government consented to deliver Scutari into the hands of international troops. Thus Montenegro rendered a very great service to its Allies.

The surrender of Scutari to the Great Powers was only a provisional measure, leaving Montenegro's right intact so that the question remained in suspense.

However, the arbitrarily fixed limits (in 1913) greatly facilitated, in 1914 and 1915, the Albanian incursions into Montenegro, directed by the Austro-Hungarian consul of Scutari. In order to stop them and to render possible the revictualling of Montenegro via the Boyana and the Lake of Scutari, the Montenegrins re-occupied Scutari in 1915 as well as the whole region to the Drin. Besides, they had been asked to do so by the population itself.

Within a short time they succeeded in regulating and organizing all the services required for the maintenance of order in the town as

well as in its environs extending to the Drin and to the sea, a thing which the local Turkish authorities and even the International troops had never succeded in doing. This administration lasted till the Austro-Hungarian invasion. To-day, after the defeat of the enemy on the Macedonian front, the Serbians arrived here the first and after severe fighting occupied the town of Scutari for the third time.

It is well known that the creation of an Albanian State is not the result of an Albanian struggle for freedom or union. Austria-Hungary wanted to create, under the name of Albania, an Austrian province in order to erect thus one more obstacle to the development of the Serbian nation. The Albanian tribes, especially those inhabiting the environs of Scutari, have absolutely no feeling of nationality, no notion of a State.

Although the enemies of Montenegro frequently made use of these tribes in order to cause troubles on the frontier, the tribes of the environs of Scutari have often given proof of their desire to join with the Montenegrins in order to fight against the Turkish regime. This same thing occurred again both in 1910 and 1912. Several times, especially in 1873, Montenegrin chiefs helped to reconcile hostile Albanian tribes.

Foreign propaganda has always been able to obtain temporary results with the Albanians. The few foreign agents installed in Scutari are not at all qualified to represent the wishes of the population of Scutari and its environs.

Those who know the habits and the sentiments of the tribes established in the environs of Scutari and on the right bank of the Drin, and their affinity with the Montenegrin population, must be convinced that these tribes would be more disposed to enter the Serbo-Croato-Slovene State than to belong to Albania, on account of their economic interests. Nothing binds them to the tribes of central or southern Albania, neither customs nor language nor their past. Lastly, religion also is no obstacle, as equality of confessions has already been proclaimed in the Serbo-Croato-Slovene State where the Roman Catholics and Mohammedans would find numerous fellow-believers.

Notwithstanding the propaganda which is made in Albania against the Serbo-Croato-Slovene State, the tribes of Krasnitchi, Gachi and Boutitchi, which are the most important tribes on the right bank of the Drin, have already manifested, in their declaration of the 6. February 1919, through of their representatives the desire to be united to this State. This desire has been submitted to the Peace Conference. There is no doubt that this example will be followed by the other tribes as soon as they get their liberty of action. One knows in what measure Serbia and Montenegro have contributed to the fundamental changes in political geography in the Balkan Peninsula, and it is just that their vital interests in these regions be respected.

One can only justify the division of the Lake of Scutari and a separation of Scutari from Montenegro and Old Serbia, if one desires to legalize and sanction the results obtained by those Albanians, who, under the direction of the enemies of the Serbian nation, have contributed to its extermination and to the forcible albanization of the same.

Scutari, like Prizren and Djakovo, has been under Turkish domination for more than four centuries and has been Serbian before that for more than seven centuries and has never belonged to the Albanian State.

Besides, even at the most brilliant epoch of their history under Skander Beg, the Albanians never went beyond the limits of the River Drin (Consult Georgius Merula Alexandrinus : Bellum Scodrense).

4. — Economic arguments

All these historical and national reasons demand that Scutari should become Serbian, but economic reasons demand it still more imperiously.

The Lake of Scutari constitutes, with its environs, an indivisible whole.

From the economic point of view artificial frontiers, arbitrarily fixed by the enemies of the country, have separated Montenegro from

its granary and national centre, Scutari, and have prevented the normal development of this town, leaving it in misery. Besides, the flowing of the Drin into the Boyana since 1846 and the carelessness of the Turkish administration have caused the level of the lake to rise and submerge the best lands; ancient fields and vineyards are at present nearly two yards under water. All the promises made concerning the canalization of the Boyana have remained vain till now and will remain so in future if the environs of Scutari are assigned to Albania.

It is only with the cession of Scutari to the Serbo-Croato-Slovene State that the regularization of the Boyana would become possible. The lowering of the level of the Lake would, according to the opinion of competent engineers, free about 12.000 hectares of araable and fertile land, and greatly improve an equal number of hectares. Independently of this great and appreciable gain, one also would obtain a good result from the hygienic point of view, as marsh-fever and malaria which are endemic around the Lake of Scutari would disappear. By the regularization of the Boyana, Scutari would become an excellent port of the Adriatic Sea.

The maritime outlet of Montenegro is Scutari and not Bar (Antivari) which is separated from the rest of the country by mountains, while the road to Scutari crosses the plain and the lake. It was only owing to unfavourable circumstances that Bar has become Montenegro's port. The narrow guage railway Vir-Bazar-Antivari will never be able to become a commercial route because its declivity is too great (40 ‰). In the past, Bar was the maritime port of Scutari; it must be that also in the future, especially for the big ships which could not go up the Boyana even after its canalization.

Scutari and its environs are the lungs with which the people of Montenegro breathes, and for lack of which it was suffocating ever since the Turks deprived it of Scutari and the Austrians hindered it from retaining that city in 1913. Our people claims the restitution of its ancient capital, and this claim is based on the principles of justice and liberty, the possession of Scutari being a vital necessity for our nation and the Serbo-Croato-Slovene State.

Scutari has been the political and economic centre of the south-

western part of the Serbian countries; it has also, at all times, been the centre in which an important part of the Serbian commerce converged. All the commerce of north-western Macedonia and of part of Serbia was directed westwards through Scutari. Scutari will rise again and become more prosperous than ever as soon as the railways from the Danube to the Adriatic (Danube-Nish-Prishtina-Diakovitza, valley of the Drin, Scutari-Bar, or eventually Cattaro) will have become a reality. When one examines the map and the land communications one sees immediately the importance of the Trans-Balkanic Danube-Adriatic line which can pass only through Scutari.

At the London Conference of 1913 Serbia's right to an outlet on the sea in this region was already recognized and admitted.

Scutari is the natural outlet for a great part of the ancient territory of the Kingdom of Serbia, for the ancient Sanjak, for Montenegro and for north-western Macedonia.

While in the regions situated on the left bank of the Drin nearly all the roads run towards Alessio and Durazzo, all the routes on the right bank are directed towards Scutari. No natural link exists between Scutari and Albania, whose centre was in Kroya and must also in future be placed in the environs of the ancient capital of Skenderbeg.

The configuration of the land and the direction of the rivers constitute Scutari the only outlet for the neighbouring Serbian countries, the mountainous territory not permitting the profitable construction of a railway line which would pass through Herzegovina or Montenegro in order to connect Serbia with the Adriatic.

As part of the Serbo-Croato-Slovene State Scutari would become so prosperous that it would compete with the greatest cities of the Balkan Peninsula. On the other hand it would be doomed to vegetate if one attributed it to Albania, for Scutari without the garrison of the Turkish times, without the hinterland of Old Serbia, separated from Montenegro, would indeed be in a precarious position and would offer no financial resources to Albania.

The vital interest of Scutari itself demands therefore that this town should not be separated from the regions which alone would give it

life in exchange for the great economic services that it would afford them.

An economical problem so clear might provoke incalculable complications in the future, if it were given a mistaken solution.

CONCLUSION

The union of Montenegro with the Serbo-Croato-Slovene State does not in any way diminish the importance of the reunion of Scutari with the former, because the economic development of Montenegro depends only upon Scutari. Scutari will make Montenegro prosperous.

Montenegro, which has suffered so much, is entitled to enter the great Serbo-Croato-Slovene community undespoiled. We sincerely wish the creation of an independent Albania, but we wish our rights to be recognizes as well.

The question of Scutari has not been dealt with in the same way as that of Albania, and the Government of that country has not extended its authority to the region and the town of Scutari. For all these reasons we are convinced that our indisputable rights will be recognized.

One glance at a the map suffices to convince everybody that Scutari is the gate of Montenegro with which it forms an indivisable whole. It is not a question of conquest but of the reparation of an old injustice.

On several occasions in 1913 Austria-Hungary proposed to Montenegro, to leave Scutari to that country, under the condition that the Lovchen should became Austrian or was at least neutralized. Had Montenegro accepted, it would have to-day been the undisputed possessor of Scutari as well as of the Lovchen. But it refused and in rendering this great service to the Allies it had to abandon Scutari. Austria-Hungary has ceased to exist. This only obstacle having disappeared, one may expect that the Allies, in uniting Scutari to the people of Montenegro, will reward them for having safeguarded the interests of the Allies when they refused to cede the strategic point of Lovchen, even

in exchange for Scutari itself. Scutari constitutes not only with Montenegro, but also with all the neighbouring Serbian regions one organic whole, and its separation from these regions would cause a very great prejudice to the town itself. On the other hand, the tribes of the region of Scutari would find in the democratic constitution of the Serbo-Croato-Slovene State all the guarantees necessary for their prosperity and their national development. The Drin, from the point where the White and the Black Drin meet, to its mouth in the Adriatic, would, as frontier, be the guarantee of a durable friendship between the Serbo-Croato-Slovene State and Albania.

The construction of the great Danube-Adriatic railway line could perhaps entail a slight deviation of the frontier to the left bank of the Drin, as well as the right to construct and maintain blockhouses on the frontier. The exent of this territory is about 400 sq. km.

If one considers all these reasons, can one refuse the Montenegrin people the region of Scutari, which is of vital necessity to it for which it has fought for five centuries and which in the Balkanic wars cost it one-third of its children ?

That is why the Montenegrins hope that the injustices which they have suffered from Austria at the eve of the last war will be repaired by their noble and powerful Allies, for, we repeat it, Austria-Hungary has wrenched Scutari from us.

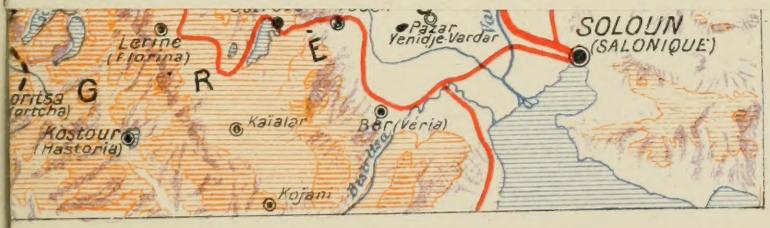
This is the point of view of the Montenegrins, these are their wishes.

Paris, April 14-th. 1919.

Andria RADOVITCH
Deputy, Montenegrin Delegate to the National Assembly of the State of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, late President of the Montenegrin Committee for National Union, late Prime Minister....

Radovan BOSHKOVITCH
Ivo VOUKOTITCH
Deputies, assistant delegates of Montenegro to the National Assembly of the State of the Serbis, Croats and Slovenes.

Imprimerie
« GRAPHIQUE »
Rue Lamblardie
PARIS (XII•)



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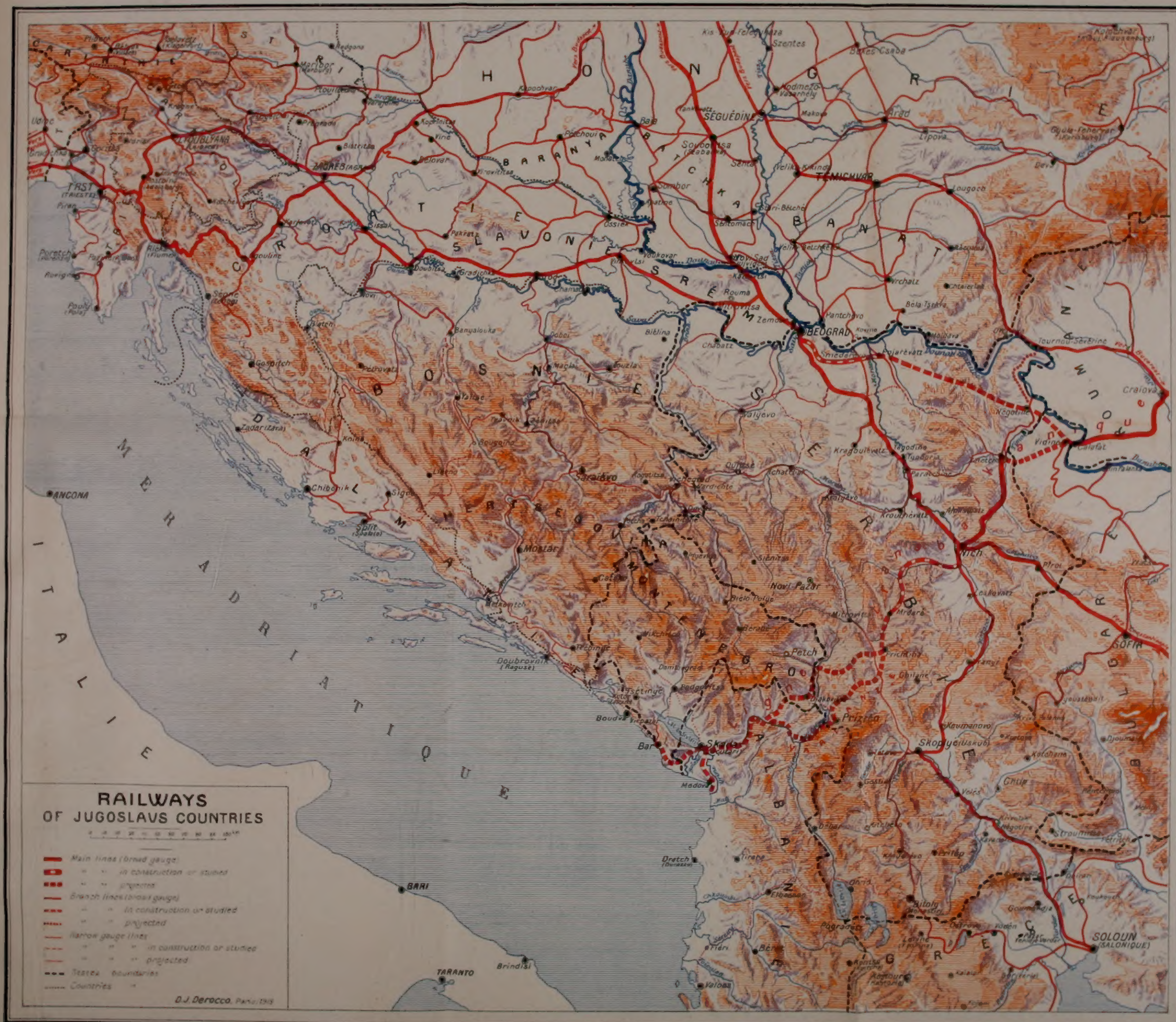

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States boundaries
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D.J. Derocco, Paris 1919
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ROUMANIE
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ALBANIE
GRÈCE
DALMATIE
BANAT
BATCHKA
BARANYA
SREM
ZAGREB
LJUBLJANA
TRST (TRIESTE)
Rieka (Fiume)
BEOGRAD
Novi Sad
TEMICHVAR
SEGUEDINE
Sarajevo
Mostar
Split
Zadar (Zara)
Chibénik
Doubrovnik (Raguse)
Cettinye
Bar
Skadar
Petch
Prizren
Skoplye (Uskub)
Nich
SOFIA
SOLOUN (SALONIQUE)
Bitolj
Ochrid
Valona
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